you have overcome in the last year. Start moving forward. Continue to do your personal best.

Soft Skills in Library Job Advertisements and LIS Curriculum

Stacy Creel
Associate Professor
School of Library and Information Science
The University of Southern Mississippi

Teresa S. Welsh
Professor and Director
School of Library and Information Science
The University of Southern Mississippi

Abstract

This study examines the top ten soft skills in 30 days of job postings for librarians, curators, archivists, and media collections specialists. It compares these skills in advertisements for Mississippi jobs and compares them to the postings of jobs from other states using data compiled by the JobsEQ software. The software pulls job advertisements from over 30,000 websites. This study then looks at Mississippi's only American Library Association Accredited MLIS program curriculum to see where these soft skills are addressed.

Introduction

There is no shortage of studies on competencies needed for library and information science professionals - often broken down by library type or state. For example, Khan, Masrek, and Nadzar (2015) discussed what is needed to be an academic librarian, and Nielson (2013) focused on academic business librarians specifically. Maccaferri and Harhai (2019) examined public library job advertisements and limited their study to the state of Pennsylvania.

Other studies evaluate soft skills in libraries typically by focusing on a specific skill. Khan and Begum (2015) looked at the soft skill of leadership, for instance. Soft skills are defined as "desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive, flexible attitude." ("soft skills," 2014). Additionally, there is no shortage of studies on the job advertisements for library positions in general. According to Starr (2004), assessments of job advertisements in librarianship tend to fall along four lines - one type of library (most commonly academic), one type of job (i.e., cataloger) across a variety of library types, all types of job in a single type of library, and the least common, broad studies of all types of jobs across all types of libraries. Starr looked at 20 years of library job advertisements in two journals looking at the number of jobs, titles of the jobs, locations of the jobs, salaries, supervisory expectations, and requirements for degrees, experience, computer skills, communication skills requirements, and foreign languages. In the results, Starr noted a growth in new jobs with an emphasis on new technologies and increased communication needs, but she also noted a decline in printed job advertisements.

The point of this research is to investigate how Mississippi online job postings compared to the other states and how the School of Library and Information Science at The University of Southern Mississippi address the listed soft skills. To accomplish this the authors look at one month of online job postings for Mississippi and the United States, focusing specifically on the soft skills employers are looking for according to the job advertisements. They then look at whether the top soft skills are addressed in the core curriculum for the Master of Library and Information Science Program through active learning assignments, theory into practice assignments, and service learning opportunities.

Selected Literature Review

The selected literature highlights some of the previous research on competencies needed for library and information science professionals.

Nielson (2013) analyzed 45 job advertisements to assess the technology trends posted in academic business librarian openings from 2007-2012. The study showed an emphasis on a "strong technology background before they begin working in the position," with 69

Peer-Reviewed Article. Received: 03/08/2021
Accepted: 08/20/2021

percent requiring some technology skills (Nielson, 2013, p. 125). Nielson's discussion also points out the need for LIS schools to emphasize technology and technology skills in their coursework, echoing what Riley-Huff and Rholes indicated in 2011. Their study indicated a difference between job seekers and library employers on the level of technology skills expected (Riley-Huff & Rholes, 2011). A similar study by Hansen (2011) reported on an analysis of job advertisements' skills and experience required for special collections librarians.

Maccaferri and Harhai (2019) investigated what public library job advertisements looked like in the state of Pennsylvania by looking at a year's worth of job postings on a discussion list. They examined types of library employment (professional, non-professional, contract, etc.), part-time versus full-time, permanent versus temporary jobs, and educational requirements. They recommended that LIS curricula include "a strong core in traditional library knowledge, skills, and abilities as well as elective courses in public services and administration" (p. 9). Job advertisements serve to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities required and desired in a particular profession. According to Maccaferri and Harhai (2019, p. 10),

> "These types of research analyses are generally used for three purposes: 1. To identify changes in the job market and to determine current job characteristics (Detmering & Sproles, 2012) 2. For advice and directions for graduates seeking employment (Torabi, 2011) 3. For library science programs conducting curriculum reviews. (Wise, Henninger, & Kennan, 2011)."

A recent publication looked at the literature on how well university graduates meet the skills required by employers and determined that there is a gap in what is taught, what is needed, and what students know. "Researchers (Deepa & Seth, 2013; Stewart et al., 2016; Lloyd, 2013) say that soft skills can help provide employees or prospective employees who possess them with a competitive edge over their counterparts who do not" (Pedersen & Hahn, 2020, p. 41). While many may agree that soft skills are important in the school library curricula, these types of skills may be difficult to incorporate and assess (Cobb, 2015).

What soft skills are being looked for by employers in Mississippi, and how does that compare to the country at large? How is the School of Library and Information Science at The University of Southern Mississippi preparing students to meet these soft skills requirements?

Methodology

Like Nielson (2013), this study looks at only one aspect of the job advertisements - the soft skills. Specifically, it looks at the soft skills listed by employers in Mississippi and the soft skills listed in job advertisements in other states. This study also examines how the curriculum for The University of Southern Mississippi's School of Library and Information Science addresses the soft skills found in job postings.

In order to determine what soft skills are being listed in job advertisements in Mississippi and the country at large, two "Real Time Intelligence Reports" were run in JobsEQ, which is software used to gather and analyze data on demographics, industries, occupations, wages, etc. The data gathered in the report were pulled from over 30,000 websites. The software attempts to remove duplicates and to draw from the requested time frame. JobsEQ was searched using the following occupations and codes: Librarians, Curators, and Archivists (25-4000), Librarians and Media Collections Specialists (25-4020). The search included job postings for the 30 day period ending March 3, 2021. The search was first run using the region of Mississippi as the delimiter and then repeated using the geographic delimiter of USA. Two reports were generated.

After identifying the soft skills for the state and the U.S., the syllabi of courses required for the MLIS were reviewed, and relevant information was compiled into an Excel spreadsheet.

Results

The first question addressed in this study is "What soft skills are listed in the job advertisements for the state of Mississippi within the 30-day time frame using the search terms described?" There were 23 job postings found with 22 different soft skills listed. Table 1 provides the list of top ten soft skills. The most common soft skill was *Communication (Verbal and written skills)*, with 39.1% of the advertisements listing this skill. The second most common soft skills, each listed in 21.7% of the job openings included the following: *Cooperative/Team Player, Problem Solving*, and *Self-Motivated/Ability to Work Independently/ Self-Leadership*. See Table 1 for more

Table 1. Top 10 Soft Skills in Mississippi Job Openings

Openings by Soft Skills

Soft Skills

Skill Name	Median Wage	Total Ads
Communication (Verbal and written skills)	n/a	9
Cooperative/Team Player	n/a	5
Problem Solving	n/a	5
Self-Motivated/Ability to Work Independently/Self Leadership	n/a	5
Adaptability/Flexibility/Tolerance of Change and Uncertainty	n/a	4
Interpersonal Relationships/Maintain Relationships	n/a	4
Customer Service	n/a	3
Analytical	n/a	2
Initiative	n/a	2
Listening	n/a	2

Table 2. Top Ten Soft Skills in US Job Openings

Openings by Soft Skills

Soft Skills

Skill Name	Median Wage	Total Ads
Communication (Verbal and written skills)	$37,841	1,807
Cooperative/Team Player	$44,703	1,198
Self-Motivated/Ability to Work Independently/Self Leadership	$35,880	624
Customer Service	$34,362	615
Organization	$37,440	585
Supervision/Management	$47,778	506
Adaptability/Flexibility/Tolerance of Change and Uncertainty	$38,579	495
Interpersonal Relationships/Maintain Relationships	$33,590	489
Detail Oriented/Meticulous	$32,080	466
Accountable/Responsible/Reliable/Dependable/Trustworthy	$38,938	449

information.

The second question addressed in this study is "What soft skills are listed in the job advertisements in the U.S. within the 30-day time frame using the search terms described?" The software found 3,224 job advertisements with 92 different soft skills listed. The top 10 are listed in Table 2. *Communication (Verbal and written skills)* once again topped the findings with 56.0% of job postings listing this soft skill. The next most frequent skill for the postings in the U.S. included *Cooperative/Team Player* (37.2%). *Self-Motivated/Ability to Work Independently/Self Leadership* (19.4%), and *Customer Service* (19.1%). More details can be found in Table 2.

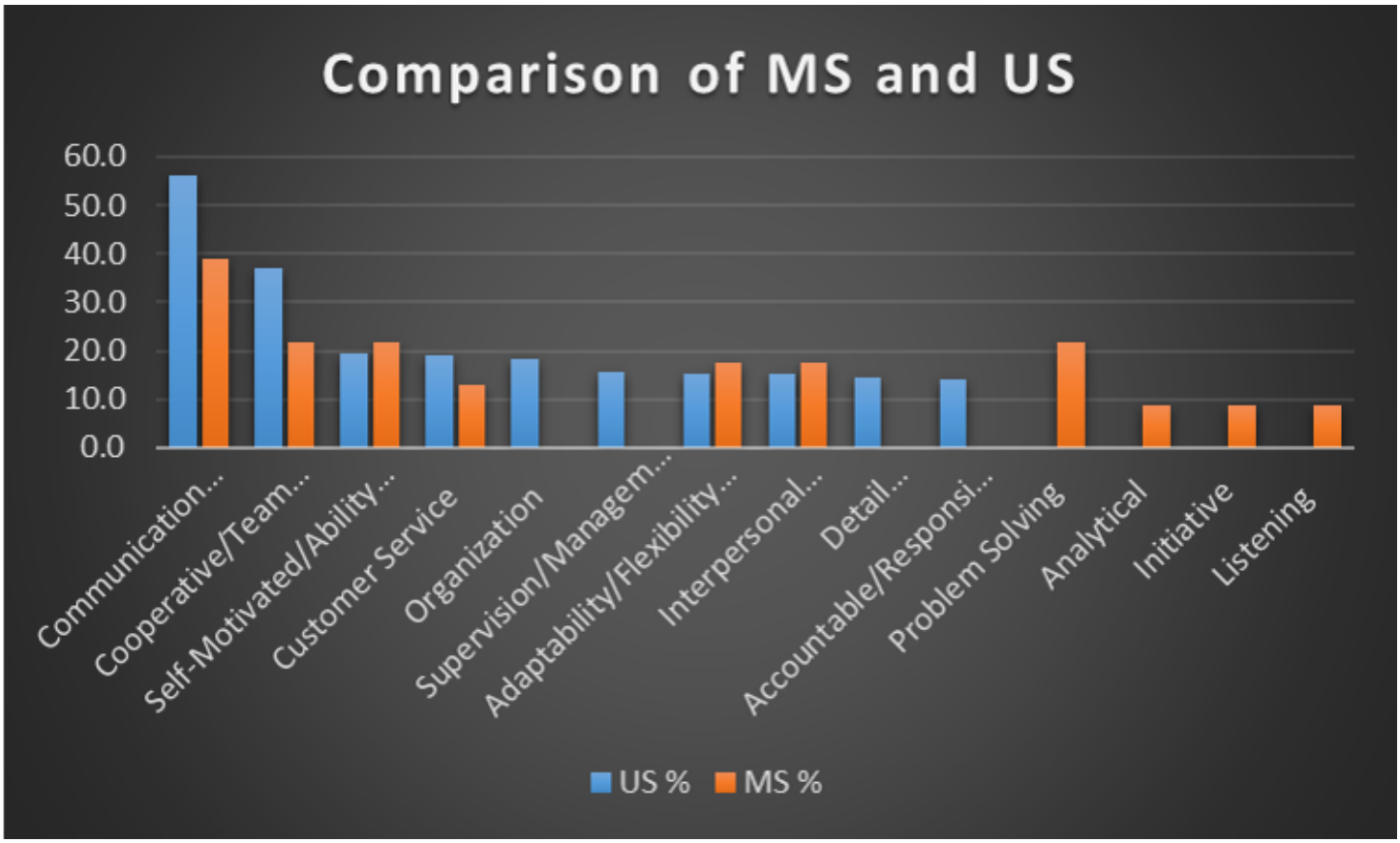
The third question addressed in this study is "How do the top ten soft skills from Mississippi compare to the top ten soft skills from across the U.S.?" Mississippi job advertisements have six soft skills that overlap with the U.S. advertisements' soft skills. In both sets of job openings, the top two most common soft skills are the same - *Communication (Verbal and written skills)* and *Cooperative/Team Player*. However, in both of the top two instances, the U.S. listings show a greater percentage of job advertisements having the two soft skills listed than in Mississippi job advertisements. Additionally, the four unique soft skills in the U.S. job postings are represented in a greater percentage of job advertisements than three of the unique soft skills found in the Mississippi job postings. The exception being that *Problem Solving* - one of Mississippi's unique top ten soft skills - is represented in 21.7% of the Mississippi job advertisements. Table 3 shows the percentage of each soft skill by data set and overall, while Figure 1 shows a comparison between Mississippi and the U.S.

Table 3. Percentages of Top 10 Soft Skills

TOP 10 SOFT SKILLS	U.S. %	MS %	Overall %
Communication (Verbal and written skills)	56.0	39.1	55.9
Cooperative/Team Player	37.2	21.7	37.0
Self-Motivated/Ability to Work Independently/Self Leadership	19.4	21.7	19.4
Customer Service	19.1	13.0	19.0
Organization	18.1	0.0	18.0
Supervision/Management	15.7	0.0	15.6
Adaptability/Flexibility/Tolerance of Change and Uncertainty	15.4	17.4	15.4
Interpersonal Relationships/Maintain Relationships	15.2	17.4	15.2
Detail Oriented/Meticulous	14.5	0.0	14.4
Accountable/Responsible/Reliable/Dependable/Trustworthy	13.9	0.0	13.8
Problem Solving	0.0	21.7	0.2
Analytical	0.0	8.7	0.1
Initiative	0.0	8.7	0.1
Listening	0.0	8.7	0.1

The fourth question addressed in this study is "How does the state's only ALA Accredited School of Library and Information Science address these soft skills?" When looking at the core curriculum for the Master in Library and Information Science program, all soft skills except *Initiative* are addressed either through active learning activities or theoretical presentation of information and response. For example, in LIS 501: Reference and Information Sources, students participate in group reference practice sessions to actively answer reference questions in a role-play situation. These sessions require *Communication (verbal) skills* as they practice the reference interview process by questioning and walking through their search process. They must be clear and precise. They also require students to actively use listening skills as students acting as library customers ask their questions and provide information (*Listening*). Before the session, students attend a lecture on active listening and communication in the reference interview process. These sessions also require students to work as a team, which enhances their *Cooperative/Team Player* soft skills. They are expected to help if someone "gets stuck" and to provide feedback to one another. They are practicing *Customer Service*, another soft skill, with their role-playing of reference librarian and customer. They also use their *Analytical* soft

Figure 1. Comparison of MS and U.S. Job Advertisement Soft Skills



skills to evaluate reference sources and questions in the quest to find the answers.

Peer assessment and feedback are part of the active learning of management skills in LIS 501. *Supervision/Management* skills are discussed theoretically in LIS 605: Library Management, in which students have readings, lectures, and discussions on human resources issues, evaluation, interviewing and hiring, scheduling, library structure, and more. They put these things into practice with *Problem Solving* case studies done in groups. They create job posts, evaluations, and practicing skills like the Feedback Sandwich in small groups. While this does not replace real-life experience, it does give them a taste and an idea of things to expect. LIS 605: Library Management also provides theoretical information through lectures and readings about the soft skills *Adaptability/Flexibility/Tolerance of Change and Uncertainty*. Students attend a lecture, complete required readings, discuss these topics and then create a public service announcement video detailing a library policy change directed either to the community, the library board, the staff, or the media, which allows them to receive critique on the soft skill *Communication (verbal)*.

Many of the soft skills required are addressed in one of the newer required courses - added in 2012 - LIS 500: Library and Information Science, a one-credit-hour orientation course. This course serves as an orientation to the program and the profession and addresses topics like how to be a successful student. As a result, the course helps students develop their soft skills in the following areas: *Self-Motivated, Ability to Work Independently, Self Leadership, Organization and Accountable, Responsible, Reliable, Dependable,* and *Trustworthy.* While the information in this class is theoretical in nature, students must actively apply it throughout the program in order to be successful. Additionally, this course focuses on ethics of the profession along with LIS 501: Reference, LIS 605: Library Management, and other electives, particularly LIS 540: Information Ethics.

Communication (written) soft skills are addressed throughout the core courses with individual written assignments in the form of papers, assignments, and discussion

postings. For example, in LIS 500: Library and Information Science, students prepare a short paper on a specific type of librarianship of interest, including professional competencies, national and regional/state professional organizations, and scholarly/refereed journals. In LIS 636: Foundations of LIS students do research and write short papers about the Library Bill of Rights and censorship versus intellectual freedom.

Students are exposed to *Analytical* soft skills in multiple courses where they critically evaluate research and conduct research, which is required in the following higher-level core courses. In LIS 651: Fundamentals of Information Science, students design and conduct a bibliometric study. In LIS 668: LIS Research Methods, the– develop a research proposal for the capstone project, which they complete in LIS 695: Master's Research Project.

The one soft skill not addressed in the core courses is *Initiative*. It is, however, addressed in two elective courses that also act as service learning courses. In LIS 641: Public Libraries, students must take the initiative to instigate and establish a relationship with a community partner. After discussing their needs, the students design a project to serve the organization. In LIS 545: Information Needs of Underserved Populations, students do a similar project with an underserved population to define unmet information needs and fill one of those needs. As with LIS 641, students are required to initiate the relationships and projects. In one core class - LIS 511: Collection Development and Management, there is the potential for students to actively engage in initiative through a weeding project, but since the parameters are vague and may include a personal collection, it was not included.

Overall, of the 14 top ten soft skills listed, the LIS curriculum addresses 92.9 %. *Initiative* is the only soft skill not being addressed in a core course.

Discussion

The MLIS degree at The University of Southern Mississippi requires 40 credit hours. Twenty-five are core course hours, and 15 are elective hours. The majority of the online classes require live sessions each week in Zoom virtual classrooms, where students may see, hear, and interact with professors and work collaboratively on group projects and presentations. As an online program, the student population is geographically diverse, with 108 of the 257 graduate students (42%) in Mississippi, while 58% are in 40 other states and Canada. The school's programs - LIS Bachelor of Science, MLIS, Archival Certificate, Youth Services Certificate - have experienced substantial growth since 2015. There has been an 89% increase in overall enrollment, and a 95% increase in graduate enrollment. The MLIS was number one the university's Top Ten Master's Degrees Awarded in 2020. Having students from various states, it is important that the program prepare students with the soft skills sought by employers both in the state and out. Six of the top ten soft skills were in both data sets and are well-covered in the program's core courses. This is especially true of the top two soft skills in the top ten, which are the same for Mississippi and the U.S. - *Communication (Verbal and written skills)* and *Cooperative/Team Player*. These top two soft skills are addressed in multiple core courses with active engagement activities, independent papers, and/or theoretical activities. With *Communication (written)* skills being addressed in 100 percent of the core courses, *Communication (verbal)* skills being addressed in 22.2% of the core classes, and *Cooperative/Team Player* in 44.4% of core classes (Table 4). Table 5 details the four soft skills that were different in each data set.

In the Mississippi jobs, *Supervision/Management* is not identified as a top 10 soft skill. When looking at the job titles in the advertisements in this data set, none of them appear to be postings for upper-level jobs: Librarian, Librarian – BMS, Library Technology Associate, Librarian/Media Specialist, Assistant Professor/Catalog Librarian, Cataloging Librarian, Data Services Librarian/Assistant/Associate Professor, and Instructional Media Librarian. However, in the U.S. data set, while only 37 job advertisements appear to be upper level or supervisory - Librarian III and Library Assistant II, the *Supervision/Management* soft skill appears in over 500 of the advertisements and is in the top 10. This may mean that in other states, even entry-level librarians are going to be responsible for some type of supervision or management role.

Almost 22% of the job advertisements in Mississippi emphasize *Problem Solving* versus not being found in the top ten soft skills for the U.S. Interestingly, problem-solving is a skill that is taught as part of management in the curricula

Table 4. Core Courses and Top Ranked Soft Skills

COURSE	Communication (Verbal skills)	Communication (Written skills)	Cooperative/ Team Player
500. Library and Information Science Orientation		1	
501. Reference and Information Sources	1	1	1
505. Cataloging and Classification		1	1
511. Collection Development and Management		1	1
605. Library Management		1	1
636. Foundations of Librarianship	1	1	
651. Fundamentals of Information Science		1	
668. Research Methods in Library and Information Science		1	
695. Master's Research Project		1	
Total:	**2**	**9**	**4**

Table 5. Percentages of Top 10 Soft Skills Not Found in Both Data Sets

TOP 10 SOFT SKILLS	U.S. %	MS %	Overall %
Organization	18.1	0.0	18.0
Supervision/Management	15.7	0.0	15.6
Detail Oriented/Meticulous	14.5	0.0	14.4
Accountable/Responsible/Reliable/Dependable/ Trustworthy	13.9	0.0	13.8
Problem Solving	0.0	21.7	0.2
Analytical	0.0	8.7	0.1
Initiative	0.0	8.7	0.1
Listening	0.0	8.7	0.1

for the state's library science program. None of the top ten soft skills in Table 2 are found in a majority percentage of either the state, U.S., or total of the listing. While *Problem Solving* may be indicated as a top ten soft skill, it is only in five of the 23 (21.7%) job advertisements within 30 days. In order to place any significance on soft skills, a larger time frame for both data sets needs to be considered along with job level.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines initiative (noun) as "That which initiates, begins, or originates; the first step in some process or enterprise; hence the act, or action, of initiating or taking the first step or lead; beginning, commencement, origination" and to take initiative as "to take the lead, make the first step, originate some action." Further investigation into how Mississippi employers see this soft skill as important in their libraries can help direct the curricula to incorporate this soft skill into more active learning activities. Students without professional library experience are encouraged to take a practicum in which they may focus and sharpen these soft skills.

Sixty percent of Mississippi's top ten soft skills are reflected in the top ten soft skills of the U.S. According to the curriculum review, the School of Library and Information Science addresses these skills through core courses and activities that provide active learning engagement and theoretical learning. From 2015-2020,

approximately 97% of graduates from The University of Southern Mississippi School of Library and Information Science obtained positions relevant to their degree within 12 months of graduation.

Conclusion

This initial research into the soft skills in Mississippi and U.S. job advertisements indicates that there are many commonalities, but there is room for further research into the differences in the postings and other posting attributes. JobsEQ can provide information on skill requirement by job-level, desired skills versus required skills, hard skills, and more. Libraries may also be interested in assessing their employees to determine are the soft skills found in the job listings actually the ones used by employees and how are they being used. Are they missing additional soft skills in the job postings? Currently, the review of the curriculum and job placement rate indicates that students in the Master's of Library and Information Science program are being adequately prepared in the desirable soft skills. This research can help inform curriculum in other library and information science programs to better prepare students for the job market.

References

Cobb, E. J., Meixelsperger, J., & Seitz, K. K. (2015). Beyond the classroom: Fostering soft skills in pre-professional LIS organizations. *Journal of Library Administration*, 55(2), 114–120.

Deepa, S., & Seth, M. (2013). Do soft skills matter? – Implications for educators based on recruiter's perspective. *The IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, 7(1), 7-20.

Detmering, R., & Sproles, C. (2012). So, you want to be a Southeastern librarian? Entry-level academic library job trends in the Southeast. *Southeastern Librarian*, 60(1), 3–15.

Hansen, K. (2011). Education, training, and recruitment of special collections librarians: An analysis of job advertisements. *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, & Cultural Heritage*, 12(2), 110–132.

Khan, A., & Begum, H. (2015). Training needs analysis on leadership skills of university librarians in Pakistan. *PUTAJ- Humanities and Social Sciences*, 23(2), 87-102.

Khan, A., Masrek, N. M. & Nadzar, F. M. (2015). An investigation of the training needs on emotional intelligence of academic librarians. *Library Review*, 64(8/9), 597-613.

Oxford University Press. (2021). Initiative. In OED online. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/96070.

Lloyd, A. (2013). Building information resilient workers: The critical ground of workplace information literacy. What have we learnt? In S. Kurbanoğlu, E. Grassian, D. Mizrachi, R. Catts, & S. Špiranec (Eds.), *European conference on information literacy*, Istanbul, Turkey, 2013 (219-228). Springer.

Maccaferri, J.T., & Harhai, M.K. (2019). What Pennsylvania public libraries want: An analysis of PAMAILALL job advertisements. *Pennsylvania Libraries Research & Practice* 7(1), 9-24.

Nielsen, J. (2013). The blended business librarian: Technology skills in academic business librarian job advertisements. *Journal of Business & Finance Librarianship*, 18(2), 119–128.

Pedersen, J., & Hahn, S. E. (2020). Library instruction versus employers' needs: Do recent graduates have the critical thinking skills and soft skills needed for success? *Practical Academic Librarianship: The International Journal of the SLA*, 10(1), 38–53.

Riley-Huff, D. A., & Rholes, J. M. (2011). Librarians and technology skill acquisition: Issues and perspectives. *Information Technology & Libraries*, 30(3), 129–140.

Collins. (2014). Soft Skills. In *Collins English Dictionary* (12th ed.). Credo Reference.

Starr, J. (2004). A measure of change: Comparing library job advertisements of 1983 and 2003. *LIBRES: Library & Information Science Research Electronic Journal*, 14(2), 1-18.

Stewart, C., Wall, A., & Marciniec, S. (2016). Mixed signals: Do college students have the soft skills that employers want? *Competition Forum*, 14(2), 276-281.

Torabi, N. (2011). A graduate degree in library or information science is required, but not sufficient, to enter the profession. *Evidence Based Library & Information Practice*, 6(1), 85–89.

Wise, S., Henninger, M., & Kennan, M. (2011). Changing trends in LIS job advertisements. *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, 42(4), 268–295.

To join MLA, or to renew your membership:

http://misslib.org/membership

2021 MLA Executive Board Minutes:

http://misslib.org/Meeting-Minutes-2021